

PROSPECT: OR, VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 1803.

[NO. 9.]

COMMENTS UPON THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

BOOK OF NUMBERS.

MOSES and his God both out of humour; they reciprocate with each other their threats and reproaches.

The first ten chapters of this Book do not contain a single idea which deserves the notice of an intelligent man for a moment; but in perusing the eleventh chapter, we behold once more the angry passions of the Jewish Jehovah let out against the meek and heaven-struck Moses. These irascible qualities of this national God, are attacked by the chosen servant of the Most High, and Moses appears in conspicuous contest, with the divinity which claims his adoration and the homage of the Jewish nation. As we are determined not to quit this *Holy Bible* till we have exposed it in all the native deformity of its character; so it will be necessary, in conformity to this resolution, to make frequent quotations from the book itself, to demonstrate beyond all contradiction the impurity of its principles, and the immorality of its precepts. Here follows a passage which requires our attention.

"Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased. And Moses said unto the Lord, wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant! and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom (as a nursing father beareth the sucking child) unto the land which thou swear-est unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness. And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and ye shall eat flesh: (for you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt) therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat: Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days: But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt? And Moses said, The people amongst whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen, and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?"

Is there any reasonable man that can read the foregoing passage and not see in it all the jarring contentions, all the angry passions and the reciprocated recriminations of altercating and malignant partizans. It appears, however, that Moses was rather the best character of the two; for in verse 10th it is said, that God was angry, and Moses was only displeased. Anger rises in its character above displeasure, and of course in the present case the Hebrew God was rather more heated than his terrestrial competitor. In the 12th verse Moses pointedly interrogates his God, and inquires of him relative to the origin of the Hebrew people; he says, have I begotten this people, that I should bear the whole burthen? This implies strongly that God was their Maker, and that in the estimation of Moses, he ought to have done more toward taking care of them: Fine language this to pass between mortal man and the God whom he adores. In the 15th verse Moses gets in a rage and reproachfully says to his God, "If thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand." This sentiment of reproach is mingled with a kind of defiance, and proves very clearly that Moses did not care a farthing whether he was any longer upon good terms with Jehovah or not. The 20th verse of this chapter is most disgustingly indelicate: God makes Moses tell the people, that "*they shall eat for a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you.*" Oh, shame upon you, ye learned believers in revelation! Did you ever see upon the face of the earth, a book so abominably filthy? In the 31st verse there is a whale of a story concerning sending quails upon the earth two cubits deep, to the extent of a day's journey this way and that; this appears also to be matter of spite, and adds something to the revengeful lustre of Jehovah's character. Christians, let me tell you, that one page of morality is worth millions of such foolish stories.

PHILOSOPHY.

THE literal meaning of the word *philosophy*, is the love of wisdom. Wisdom includes in it a knowledge of truth and the practice of moral virtue. When it is considered that under the term philosophy, as used in modern days, the whole science of physics is included, and also all the relations and bearings of the moral world; it should seem at first, that the definition has been extended, and a greater variety of matter included within the philosophic circle; but this by a recurrence to the primary definition, will appear to be a fallacious idea, and the original idea will stand in the estimation of truth unimpeached. The study of philosophy is the study of every thing valuable in relation to the great concerns of human existence; it ought, therefore, to awaken the highest energies of intellectual power, and pour consolation into the heart of ignorant and unhappy man. The real, the complete philosopher, is destitute of all the prejudices of superstition, and holds in contempt the follies of antiquity. He commiserates the unhappy condition of his fellow-beings, and sympathizes with them in their sufferings. He brings his faculties into the highest state of activity for the important purpose of diminishing evil and augmenting good over the face of the whole earth. In proportion as the principles of a sound and excellent

philosophy shall be disseminated amongst mankind, in the same proportion their sufferings will be alleviated, their rational pleasures multiplied, and the dignity of their existence presented in all the native brilliancy of its character.

Under these impressions of the importance of the subject, we have procured a history of philosophy from the earliest times down to the present day, and we mean to make such use of it in the Prospect, as in our judgment will conduce in the highest degree to the moral pleasure and the scientific improvement of our subscribers. Sometimes whole chapters will be inserted verbatim; sometimes detached portions will be selected with such alterations and amendments as will best comport with the character of truth; and at all times we shall take the liberty of making such comments upon philosophers and philosophic systems, as in our estimation the nature of the case may demand, and such as will tend most to public utility.

OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PERSIANS.

CONCERNING the philosophy of the Persians (which comes first under our consideration) it is difficult to form a satisfactory judgment: for, we have no information upon this subject but from the Greeks and Arabians; and the accounts we receive from both are liable to material objections. The Greeks had, indeed, sufficient opportunities for becoming acquainted with the affairs, the religion, and the tenets of this people: but their inveterate enmity against the Persians, rendered them incapable of giving a fair representation of what they saw or heard; and their partiality to their own institutions led them to speak contemptuously of those of all barbarous nations. As to the Arabians, notwithstanding the credit which has been given them by several writers of distinguished erudition, particularly by Pococke, Prideaux, Beausobre, and Hyde, it must be confessed that difficulties, of still greater magnitude, embarrass their testimony. Not to urge, that the Arabian writers were little qualified, either by natural temper or by education, for the arduous task of examining questions, which time had involved in the deepest obscurity; it is most evident, that the shameful practice, which, after the time of Mahomet, prevailed amongst the Arabians, of supporting their new religion at the expence of truth, and making use of every kind of falsehood, particularly that of imposing upon the world suppositious writings, in order to reconcile Jews and Christians to their system, renders their evidence, in all doubtful cases, exceedingly liable to suspicion. That this charge against the Arabian writers is not without foundation, will fully appear in the sequel, and cannot indeed be questioned by those who have read their works without prejudice, and observed what absurd fables they have endeavoured to pass upon the world, under the sanction of ancient names, for genuine history. It must not, therefore, be thought surprising, if even from such eminent modern writers as those above mentioned, we reserve, with some degree of hesitation, accounts of the ancient Persians which are given wholly upon the credit of the Arabians, and presume to question, whether, in reporting these accounts, sufficient attention has been paid to the nature of historical evidence. We perceive much occasion for this

kind of suspicion, in the writings of the learned Hyde, whose fondness for oriental learning seems to have led him to magnify slight conjectures and doubtful traditions into certain facts, and to have prevented him from making a judicious use of the immense mass of materials with which his erudition furnished him. Having laid it down to ourselves as an invariable rule, not to admit any authority till we have carefully examined its foundation, we must be allowed not to give credit to modern reports, unless we find them supported by more solid evidence than that of the Arabians, and confirmed either by the concurrent testimony of the Greek writers, or by circumstances of probability derived from some other quarter. This is the only way in which we can possibly lay before our readers an impartial history of philosophy.

Philosophy was introduced, or rather revived and corrected, among the Persians, by Zardusht, whom the Greek writers call Zoroaster. The different accounts given of Zoroaster by the Greeks, and by the Arabians and Persians, can only be reconciled by supposing, as we have done, that the Chaldean and the Persian Zoroaster were different persons, and that the latter lived at a much later period than the former. From comparing these accounts, it is probable that the latter was of Persian extraction, and was born in Media. What the Arabian writers report concerning his having been early instructed by the Jews, seems to be a fiction invented to obtain credit, among the Jews and Christians, to the doctrines which they professed to have received from him. It is not, however, improbable, that he might have learned some things from the Israelites residing in Babylon, which might be of use to him in executing his design of correcting the doctrine of the Persian Magi, though it may not be easy to specify the particulars.

Several miracles are ascribed to Zoroaster, such as an artful impostor would naturally attempt, and would not perhaps find it difficult to perform. It is said, particularly, that he suffered melted metal to be poured upon his bosom, and held fire in his hand, without suffering any injury. Having by these and other artifices established his credit, it is related that he undertook the revival and improvement of the religion of the ancient Magi, which had long before this time prevailed in Media and Persia, but which, in consequence of the massacre of the Magi (who after the death of Cambyses had usurped the government) had been interrupted, and almost entirely supplanted, by the worship of the stars, to which the Persians, with their king Darius, were addicted. Much is also said by the Arabian writers, concerning the learning which Zoroaster acquired from the Indian Brachmans; concerning the influence which he obtained with Darius, and the success with which he propagated his system; and lastly, concerning his assassination, by Argaspis, king of the Eastern Scythia, at the siege of Bactria. But the silence of the Greeks, who were at this time well acquainted with the affairs of Persia, and after Alexander's conquests must have become possessed of many Persian records, is a circumstance which casts a cloud of suspicion over these relations. Thus much, however, may be admitted as probable; that there was in Persia, in the time of Darius Hystaspes, a reformer, who, assuming the ancient name of Zoroaster, brought back the Persians from the worship of the stars, to their ancient worship of fire, with some innovations both in doctrine and ceremonies. Perhaps too it may be added, that he was acquainted with

astronomy, with the medical art, and with other branches of learning, as far as they were at that time advanced in the East. Both the reality and the success of this attempt are confirmed by the testimony of Lucian, who relates, that in his time the ancient religion of the Magi flourished among the Persians, the Parthians, the Bactrians, the Chorasmiens, the Sacans, the Medes, and other barbarous nations. And the reports of modern travellers give farther credit to this relation; for we learn from them, that there is still, in the province of Carmania, a sect who adhere to the doctrines of Zoroaster, and worship fire according to the institutions of the ancient Magi.

To Zardusht, or the Persian Zoroaster, many writings are ascribed. One of these, called the Zend, is said to be still remaining among the followers of Zoroaster, and is esteemed of sacred authority. It is written in the Persian language, and consists of two parts, one of which contains their forms of devotion and order of ceremonies; the other, the precepts of religion and morality. A portion of this book, or of a compendium of it, called the Sadder, is read to the people, on every sacred day, by their priests. There is, however, much reason to question, whether this book be of such ancient date as the time of Zoroaster: probably, it was written about the time when many Jews and Christians resided among the Persians, that is, about the fourth or fifth century. Many other works in astrology, physics, theology, &c. have been attributed to Zoroaster, but they are all lost, and it is probable that most of them were forged to serve the purposes of imposture.

Fragments of a work, entitled *The Oracles of Zoroaster*, are still extant. A small collection of these fragments, consisting of only sixty verses, was published by Pletho. Patricius afterwards made a much larger collection, containing 323 verses, with the commentaries of the Platonic philosophers. Several other editions of these verses have been published, and much pains has been taken by various writers to explain them. Stanley has subjoined to his account of *The Lives of Philosophers* a correct translation of them. They are quoted, with the highest respect, by philosophers of the Alexandrian school, as genuine remains of Chaldean wisdom. But they abound so much in the ideas and language peculiar to that school, that it is probable they were written by some Platonist, about the beginning of the second century: a period when nothing was more common than to attempt to support the falling credit of genuine philosophy, by spurious writings.

Besides Zoroaster, we have few eminent names remaining, among the ancient Persian philosophers. The prince Hystaspes has been ranked in this class; and it is related that he ordered his son Darius to inscribe upon his tomb the title of Master of the Magi. It is probable, that, after the usual manner of kings in ancient times, he united in himself the two characters of high priest and sovereign prince. Hostanes is also mentioned by Eusebius, as an eminent Persian philosopher, who borrowed his learning from the Egyptians: but it is, not without reason, suspected by Scaliger and Bochart, that the passage is surreptitious, and was inserted by Panodorus, a monk, in order to give the sanction of antiquity to the art of alchymy.

Though our information concerning the history of philosophy among the Persians, in the ages prior to the time of Zoroaster, is very imperfect, it is certain, from the united testimony of the Greeks and Ara-

mans, that long before that time the Magi existed as a body, and were the official guardians of religion and learning. The religion which they taught, consisted in the worship of the sun or fire; a practice which prevailed among the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and many other eastern nations. The name under which the Persians worshipped the sun, or rather the invisible Deity, whom they supposed to be in a peculiar manner, resident in this luminary, was Mithras. Both Herodotus and Strabo relate, that the Persians worshipped none of the gods but the sun: and it appears, from comparing the inscriptions on several ancient Persian monuments yet remaining, that Mithras was the name of this divinity. Among these are the following: *Deo Soli invicto Mithræ*; and, *Omnipotenti deo Mithræ*. The historians just cited add, that the Persians sacrificed horses to the sun: a circumstance to which Ovid alludes, when he says:

*Placat equo Persis radiis Hyperionia cinctum,
Ne detur celeri victima tarda Deo.*

It may be conjectured, that, in a more remote period, some eminent hero, or public benefactor, whose name was Mithras, had after his death been deified: for, in certain ancient Persian monuments, Mithras is represented as a mighty hunter, armed with a sword, having a tiara on his head, and riding a bull. Perhaps the Persians might conceive the soul of this hero to be resident in the sun, and might afterwards transfer their worship to the sun itself under the name of Mithras. But, whatever be thought of this conjecture, it can scarcely be doubted, that the sun, under this name, was an object of worship among the Persians.

It has been disputed, whether the Persians worshipped the sun as immediately the supreme divinity, or considered him as the visible representation of a higher invisible power. The passages above referred to have been urged in proof of the former opinion: in support of the latter, are adduced the testimonies of Herodotus and Xenophon, who say, that the Persians looked upon lightnings as the ensigns of the supreme divinity; and of Strabo, who relates, that they called the whole circuit of the heavens, God. The true solution of this difficulty probably is, that the vulgar paid their worship immediately to the sun, as the visible fountain of light and heat, whilst the more enlightened, conceiving of the Deity as the soul of the world, diffused thro' the whole circuit of the universe, imagined the sun to be the chief seat of this divine principle, and paid homage to that luminary, as the representative of the invisible power. Whilst the multitude were contented with a sensible object of devotion, the Magi, and those whom they instructed in the mysteries of religion, considered the sun and fire merely as visible symbols of the animating principle of the universe.

Besides Mithras, the Persians worshipped, under opposite characters, Oromasdes and Arimanius, the former as the author of all good, the latter as the author of all evil. Perhaps these divinities were originally, like Mithras, merely human beings; the one, a good prince, who had distinguished himself by rendering important services, military or civil, to his countrymen; the other a tyrant, who had been the cause of grievous public calamities. Arimanius was not called by the

Persians a god, but an evil demon, and they always wrote his name with the letters inverted. This rude and vulgar superstition, which had no other object than individual men, was afterwards corrected and improved by philosophy, till it was changed into the worship of two spiritual beings, the one the author of good, the other of evil. The system which supposes two such principles in nature, seems to have been held by the Persian Magi before the time of Zoroaster; but how far they supposed them dependent upon the supreme divinity, does not appear. Zoroaster, however, certainly taught the doctrine of their inferiority to the first parent of all things, and introduced many alterations into the religious system and ceremonies of the Magi, which are intimately connected with the history of philosophy.

The sacred fire, which the Persians had hitherto worshipped upon altars erected in the open air, Zoroaster appointed to be inclosed in temples, the care of which was committed to an order of Magi, or priests. These Magi were divided into three classes. The first consisted of the inferior priests, who conducted the ordinary ceremonies of religion; the second presided over the sacred fire; the third was the Archimagus, or high-priest, who possessed supreme authority over the whole order. They had three kinds of temples; first, common oratories, in which the people performed their devotions, and where the sacred fire was kept only in lamps; next, public temples, with altars, on which the fire was kept continually burning, where the higher order of the Magi directed the public devotions, and the people assembled, to perform magical incantations, hear interpretations of dreams, and practice other superstitions; and lastly, the grand seat of the Archimagus, which was visited by the people at certain seasons with peculiar solemnity, and to which it was deemed an indispensable duty for every one to repair, at least once in his life. This principal temple was erected by Zoroaster, in the city of Balch, and remained till the seventh century, when, the followers of Zoroaster being driven by the Mahometans into Carmania, another building of the same kind was raised, to which those who still adhered to the ancient Persian religion resorted. They were divided into several sects; but this division probably rather respected the mode of conducting the offices of religion, than religious tenets. The kings of Persia were not allowed to take possession of their government, till they had been instructed in the mysteries of religion, and enrolled among the Magi. No images or statues, were permitted in the Persian worship. Hence, when Xerxes found idols in the Grecian temples, he, by the advice of the Magi, set them on fire, saying, that the gods, to whom all things are open, are not to be confined within the walls of a temple.

The account which Diogenes Laertius gives of the Persian Magi is this: "They are employed in worshipping the gods by prayers and sacrifices, as if their worship alone would be accepted; they teach their doctrine concerning the nature and origin of the gods, whom they think to be fire, earth, and water; they reject the use of pictures and images, and reprobate the opinion, that the gods are male and female; they discourse to the people concerning justice; they think it impious to consume dead bodies with fire; they allow of marriage between mother and son; they practice divination and prophecy, pretending that the gods appear to them; they forbid the use of orna-

ments in dress ; they clothe themselves in a white robe ; they make use of the ground as their bed, of herbs, cheese, and bread, for food, and of a reed for their staff." And Strabo relates, that there were in Cappadocia, a great number of Magi, who were called Pyrethi, or worshippers of fire, and many temples of the Persian gods, in the midst of which were altars, attended by priests, who daily renewed the sacred fire, accompanying the ceremony with music.

The religious system of the Magi was materially improved by Zoroaster. Plutarch, speaking of his doctrine, says ; " Some maintain, that, neither is the world governed by blind chance without intelligence, nor is there one mind alone at the head of the universe ; but, since good and evil are blended, and nature produces nothing unmixed, we are to conceive, not that there is one store-keeper, who, after the manner of a host, dispenses adulterated liquors to his guests, but that there are in nature two opposite powers, counteracting each other's operations, the one accomplishing good designs, the other evil. To the better power Zoroaster gave the name of Oromasdes ; to the worse that of Arimanius ; and affirmed, that, of sensible objects, the former most resembled light, the latter darkness. He also taught, that Mithras was a divinity, who acted as moderator between them, whence he was called by the Persians, the Mediator." After relating several fabulous tales concerning the contests between the good and evil demon, Plutarch, still reciting the doctrines of Zoroaster, proceeds : " The fated time is approaching, in which Arimanius himself shall be utterly destroyed ; in which the surface of the earth shall become a perfect plain, and all men shall speak one language, and live happily together in one society." He adds, on the authority of Theopompus, " It is the opinion of the Magi, that each of these gods shall subdue and be subdued by turns for six thousand years, but that at last, the evil principle shall perish, and men shall live in happiness, neither needing food, nor yielding a shadow ; the God who directs these things taking his repose for a time, which, though it may seem long to man, is but short." Diogenes Laertius, after Hecateus, gives it as the doctrine of Zoroaster, that the gods (meaning, doubtless, those of whom he last speaks, Oromasdes and Arimanius) were derived beings.

To be continued.

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